Pastors as Public Diplomats: Evangelical Influence Networks, Israel, and the Friends of Zion Ambassador Model

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In late 2025, a large delegation of U.S. evangelical leaders traveled to Israel under a program framed as an "ambassador" formation: participants would return home with firsthand impressions, a renewed theological narrative, and a mandate to speak publicly about what they saw. Whatever one's politics, the event provides a clean case study in how modern influence moves: not primarily through parties or formal diplomacy, but through credentialed community nodes who already command trust, media reach, and repeated weekly attention. This paper treats the delegation as a networked communications intervention. It asks three questions. First, what is the institutional design of an "ambassador summit" when the product is not policy but durable public perception? Second, how do religious identity, moral language, and pastoral vocation function as amplification technologies in an era of platform-driven attention? Third, what are the measurable downstream effects in sermons, podcasts, donor flows, and congregational attitudes, especially across generational lines within evangelicalism? Methodologically, the paper proposes a bounded, evidence-forward approach: map the program's stated goals, analyze the rhetorical frames deployed on-stage and after return, and distinguish pastoral testimony from political messaging without assuming either is insincere. The aim is descriptive clarity about a phenomenon that is likely to recur.

Keywords: evangelical pastors, public diplomacy, Christian Zionism, Israel advocacy, narrative warfare, religious networks, political communication, strategic persuasion, antisemitism discourse, media ecosystems, generational polarization, Friends of Zion.

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1. Problem Statement and Research Questions

The delegation of U.S. evangelical leaders to Israel in late 2025 is best studied as a communications intervention rather than as a diplomatic mission in the classical sense. Its central output is not a signed document, a negotiated concession, or a binding agreement. The output is narrative: a curated set of experiences, frames, and "tellable" stories that participants carry back into congregations, media channels, donor networks, and civic relationships. In that sense, the program sits in a modern zone where religious authority, identity-based solidarity, and media distribution blend into something that resembles public diplomacy but is delivered through non-state actors.

This paper therefore treats the summit as a case study in how influence is constructed and propagated when the main product is legitimacy, memory, and moral interpretation. Figures such as Benjamin Netanyahu, Mike Evans, Mike Huckabee, and Johnnie Moore are relevant not only because they are recognizable names, but because they symbolize the interlocking layers of state interest, civil society organization, religious vocation, and media reach that define this genre of effort. The question is not whether the narratives are "true" in some absolute sense, but how they are assembled, authorized, and amplified, and what measurable effects they have when they land back home.

1.1 What an "ambassador" program is when its output is narrative, not treaty

An "ambassador" program with narrative output functions like a distributed persuasion pipeline. It does not attempt to win policy by direct negotiation; instead it shapes the environment in which policy becomes thinkable, legitimate, or morally required. The practical aim is to seed a set of interpreters in key communities who can speak with a special kind of authority: not merely the authority of opinion, but the authority of witnessed presence. The program's distinctive mechanism is the conversion of travel and encounter into credibility.

Three features distinguish this model from traditional diplomacy.

First, it produces testimony rather than documents. The participants return as living artifacts of proximity. They are expected to say, in effect: I was there; I saw; therefore you should trust my account over secondhand narratives. This turns the trip into an epistemic credential that can be repeatedly cashed in across sermons, interviews, podcasts, and informal conversations.

Second, it leverages pre-existing trust networks rather than building new ones. The pastor does not need to earn a following the way a new political organization does. Congregational attention is already routinized and recurring; pastoral authority is already socially installed. An "ambassador" program in this setting is less about creating influence than about redirecting and focusing influence that already exists.

Third, it treats narrative as infrastructure. If enough respected community figures adopt the same interpretive frame, the frame becomes a default lens through which events are understood. It becomes the background explanation that people carry into news consumption, voting decisions, interfaith relations, and moral discourse. That is why the design emphasis often falls on high-salience sites, emotionally potent encounters, and concise moral language that can be repeated without distortion.

In this model, "public diplomacy" is accomplished by shaping the stories that publics tell themselves, not by persuading a foreign ministry across a table. The "ambassadors" are not emissaries to a state; they are emissaries to their own public.

1.2 Research questions, scope limits, and a neutrality standard

This paper asks a deliberately bounded set of questions. It does not aim to settle the Israel–Palestine conflict or adjudicate all competing historical claims. It aims to clarify a mechanism: how a large, organized delegation of religious leaders functions as an influence system.

Research questions:

1. What is the program logic of a large-scale pastor and influencer delegation presented as "ambassador training"? What are the stated goals, the implied goals, and the practical mechanisms used to achieve them?
2. How does commissioning rhetoric function as a conversion device that turns travel into vocation? What does commissioning add beyond tourism, and how does it authorize public speech after return?
3. What rhetorical frames are most prominent in the post-trip accounts delivered to U.S. audiences? How are themes such as antisemitism, solidarity, trauma, covenant, and truth-claims invoked and stabilized?
4. How does network diffusion work in practice? Through what channels do post-trip narratives spread: pulpits, livestreams, podcasts, denominational networks, social platforms, donor appeals, and local media?
5. What are plausible measurable outcomes of this kind of intervention? Examples include shifts in congregational sentiment, donation patterns, speaking circuit invitations, local interfaith dynamics, or changes in what topics pastors treat as "pastoral" versus "political."

Scope limits:

1. Incomplete roster problem. Without a full public list of participants, analysis must rely on publicly identified individuals, self-disclosures, and secondary reporting. This introduces selection bias: the most visible voices are not necessarily representative.
2. Intentionality caution. The analysis will not assume that either organizers or participants are cynically manipulating audiences. A program can produce predictable effects even if many actors participate in good faith.
3. Normative restraint. The paper will not attempt to prove that one political stance is morally superior. It will instead distinguish descriptive claims from evaluative claims. Where evaluation appears, it will be limited to methodological and ethical questions about persuasion, transparency, and pastoral responsibility.

Neutrality standard:

Neutrality here does not mean moral indifference or false equivalence. It means methodological fairness: applying the same interpretive discipline to each side's narratives, acknowledging uncertainty where evidence is incomplete, and resisting the temptation to treat agreement as proof and disagreement as pathology. The paper's operating posture is: describe mechanisms; locate claims in context; identify what is known, what is inferred, and what is unknown; and keep the analysis compatible with multiple moral and political viewpoints.

1.3 Key definitions: pastor, influencer, commissioning, solidarity trip, public diplomacy

Pastor. A pastor is a recognized religious leader responsible for teaching, worship leadership, spiritual care, and community governance within a Christian congregation or ministry. For this paper, the key analytic trait is not ordination status but institutional role: a pastor is a high-trust node who can repeatedly address the same audience over time and can shape how that audience interprets moral events.

Influencer. An influencer is a public-facing figure whose primary power is distribution: the ability to reach large audiences through media channels and to frame issues in ways that travel across networks. Influencers can be pastors, but the category also includes authors, podcasters, activists, and institutional spokespeople. The analytic trait is reach and repeatability, not formal office.

Commissioning. Commissioning is a ritualized or formalized act that authorizes a person to act publicly in a role framed as spiritually and morally significant. It converts participation from optional interest into perceived duty. In communication terms, commissioning increases the speaker's legitimacy while also increasing the perceived moral cost of silence. When leaders

such as Mike Huckabee use commissioning language, the effect is to bind the trip's narrative output to vocational identity rather than to mere opinion.

Solidarity trip. A solidarity trip is travel designed to express alignment with a community under stress, threat, or stigma, and to return with publicly communicable testimony of that alignment. It differs from standard tourism by its moral framing and from standard fact-finding by its relational aim. The analytic trait is not whether learning occurs, but that learning is packaged as moral witness.

Public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is the effort to influence foreign publics and international opinion through communication, cultural exchange, and reputation management rather than through formal negotiation or coercion. In the context of a pastor delegation, public diplomacy becomes indirect and decentralized: a state or state-adjacent institution interfaces with civil society leaders who then speak to their own domestic publics. The "diplomatic" effect is achieved by shaping the narratives that govern public legitimacy, not by producing a treaty.

Taken together, these definitions situate the summit not as a curiosity or an anomaly, but as a repeatable template: assemble high-trust communicators, provide curated experiences, commission them into public speech, and rely on network diffusion to turn personal witness into durable narrative infrastructure.

2. Program Architecture and Institutional Interfaces

The delegation can be understood as a designed pipeline that converts attendance into repeatable authority. The visible components are travel, programming, and ceremonies; the functional components are selection, credentialing, and distribution. In practice, the program looks less like a conference and more like an influence system: recruit high-trust communicators, place them inside a curated experiential sequence, confer an "ambassador" identity, then rely on their existing channels to propagate a stable narrative back into local communities. The program's architecture matters because it solves a hard problem in persuasion: how to turn complex, contested events into simple, durable, locally deliverable stories without requiring every audience member to become a subject-matter expert.

2.1 Organizing logic: selection, vetting, pledges, and training claims

The program's front end is an applicant funnel and screening process. Even where precise numbers vary across accounts, the underlying logic is consistent: the organizers are not merely filling seats; they are selecting distribution nodes. "Selection" is about influence capacity and message reliability as much as spiritual leadership. "Vetting" is about lowering reputational risk

and increasing predictability: the program works best when participants are likely to return home and speak in ways aligned with the program's stated aims.

The pledge component functions as a binding mechanism. A pledge is not only a public signal; it is a psychological commitment device. Once a leader has pledged solidarity and accepted the "ambassador" identity, their future speech is shaped by an internal consistency pressure: silence or ambivalence now feels like betrayal of a role they publicly accepted. In this way, pledges can convert a week-long trip into months or years of message persistence.

Training claims complete the conversion. The program implies, and sometimes explicitly states, that participants are being equipped with facts, framing language, and a recognized credential to "go back and tell." This training is not primarily academic. It is rhetorical, moral, and practical: what to say, what to emphasize, what to repeat, what images or experiences to reference, and how to respond to common objections. The "ambassador" certificate or graduation ceremony, where present, is the program's formal seal: it transforms attendance from experience into mandate.

Taken together, selection, vetting, pledges, and training create a continuity chain. The chain is designed so that once participants return home, they can speak not as distant commentators but as commissioned witnesses, with a story that is easy to carry and hard to dislodge.

2.2 State-facing interface and civil-society interface

A defining feature of this model is its two-sided interface. On one side sits the state-facing layer: official recognition, symbolic access, and the presence of senior political figures. On the other side sits civil society: religious organizations, networks, and media ecosystems capable of saturating local public life. The interface between these layers is where the program gains its distinctive power.

The state-facing interface offers legitimacy and gravity. When senior officials appear or when official institutions are visibly involved, the trip feels less like private activism and more like a moment of historical significance. That significance functions as an amplifier when delegates return to speak. They can present the trip as participation in a consequential national story, not merely a personal spiritual journey.

The civil-society interface supplies distribution. The program does not need to invent new audiences. Pastors already have recurring weekly platforms; influencers already have subscriber bases; advocacy leaders already have donor and media relationships. The civil-society layer turns the summit into a multiplier: one week in-country becomes countless retellings across pulpits, livestreams, podcasts, newsletters, and informal networks.

A key architectural benefit of the two-sided interface is deniability and flexibility. The state can frame its involvement as outreach and education, while civil-society actors can frame their participation as pastoral duty, moral solidarity, or spiritual vocation. This dual framing allows the same program to be heard differently by different audiences: diplomacy to some, discipleship to others, and "truth-telling" to those who see themselves in an information war.

2.3 Publicly identified individuals referenced in coverage and commentary

Public reporting and commentary identify a small subset of visible figures who function as anchors for the program's narrative and governance. The list below is not a complete roster of attendees; it is a map of roles within the influence architecture, using names that have appeared in public discussion.

State-facing anchor: Benjamin Netanyahu functions as a high-authority legitimizer whose presence frames the delegation as consequential and welcomed at the top of the political hierarchy.

Primary civil-society organizer: Mike Evans appears as the initiating entrepreneur of the model, positioning the program as an organized pathway for scaling pro-Israel advocacy through evangelical networks.

High-visibility political-religious speaker: Mike Huckabee functions as a translator between American conservative political culture and evangelical moral rhetoric, reinforcing the "commissioning" frame and the duty to return and speak.

Evangelical leadership voice: Johnnie Moore appears as a featured figure articulating the meaning of the moment, often emphasizing urgency, antisemitism discourse, and public courage.

Recognizable pastoral nodes: Jack Graham, Clint Pressley, Doug Clay, Skip Heitzig, and Max Lucado represent the "installed trust" layer: leaders whose reputations and platforms can normalize a frame across large audiences without requiring institutional coordination beyond their own ministries.

Movement and advocacy operators: Ralph Reed and Mat Staver represent the connective tissue to U.S. political and legal mobilization ecosystems, where narratives can translate into calls for civic action.

Media amplification figures: Erick Stakelbeck and Jay Strack represent broadcast-ready distribution, turning summit framing into content that can circulate beyond local congregations.

Participant testimony examples: Ronny Raines and David McKinley appear as examples of return-ready witness language, emphasizing the emotional impact of site visits and the claim that firsthand seeing confers a special obligation to speak.

Next-generation and ministry-adjacent voices: Derrick Aguirre, Laura Dobson, and Ryan Dobson illustrate how the program can target not only senior pastors but also adjacent leaders who influence younger audiences and broader media channels.

Non-pastor delegation voice: Tamryn Foley appears in discussion as an example of how the delegation's messaging can include explicitly political demographic claims alongside personal empathy narratives.

Certificate and credential imagery example: DeWayne Howard appears as an example of how the program's credentialing layer can be personalized and circulated as proof of participation, reinforcing the "ambassador" identity after return.

These publicly named figures clarify the program's architecture: top-level political legitimation, civil-society orchestration, high-trust pastoral distribution, advocacy translation into civic arenas, media amplification, and a set of testimonial voices that model the intended "return speech."

3. The Commissioning Frame as a Communication Technology

A commissioning frame is more than a ceremonial flourish. It is a communication technology: a designed method for converting experience into authority, and authority into durable speech. In ordinary politics, persuasion often depends on credentials, data, or institutional office. In pastoral communication, persuasion often depends on perceived integrity, spiritual seriousness, and vocation. Commissioning operates precisely at that junction. It takes a trip that could be dismissed as "tourism," "activism," or "political theater" and recodes it as spiritual duty. Once recoded, the trip's narrative is no longer merely an interpretation; it becomes a calling. That shift changes the speaker's internal posture and the audience's expectations, making post-trip speech feel less optional and more required.

Commissioning also stabilizes messaging across a dispersed network. If a thousand people return with a thousand idiosyncratic summaries, the program's influence disperses. If they return with a shared sense of having been commissioned into a role, their speech converges: similar phrases, similar moral claims, similar emphases. This convergence does not require centralized scripting. It emerges from a shared vocational identity and the social pressure to speak in ways consistent with that identity. In that sense, commissioning is a low-cost way to

standardize narrative output while allowing speakers to maintain the appearance of personal authenticity.

3.1 Commissioning language and vocational authority

Commissioning language borrows from religious categories of sending, calling, and mandate. It signals that the delegate is not merely a private individual with an opinion but a representative entrusted with responsibility. In Christian contexts, commissioning echoes biblical motifs: being sent, bearing witness, shepherding truth, and standing firm under social pressure. This language does three things at once.

First, it elevates the speech act. The delegate is not "sharing a view"; the delegate is "testifying." Testimony is perceived as morally weightier than argument. It also disincentivizes casual contradiction: people argue with opinions, but they hesitate to argue with witness, especially witness framed as spiritually motivated.

Second, it recruits vocational authority. Pastors already occupy an office in which their speech is expected to carry spiritual weight. When they are commissioned, the trip is absorbed into that office. Their return message is not merely "what I saw"; it becomes "what I must tell you," with pastoral urgency. This transforms the congregation from an audience of consumers into a congregation of accountable hearers. The rhetoric implies: you are not just listening; you are being morally instructed.

Third, commissioning protects the speaker against doubt and fatigue. Many leaders return from high-intensity events unsure how to speak without overreaching. Commissioning provides a ready-made identity that resolves uncertainty. If the speaker wonders, "Is this my lane?" commissioning answers, "Yes, this is now your lane." It pre-authorizes the topic as legitimate pastoral content.

In communication terms, commissioning is a legitimacy generator. It does not prove the truth of a claim. It increases the perceived right to speak and the perceived obligation to listen.

3.2 Witness, pilgrimage, and the production of moral credibility

A solidarity trip gains power when it is experienced as pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is travel that changes the traveler and, by changing the traveler, changes the plausibility of what they say. It signals sacrifice, seriousness, and encounter. That signal has downstream effects.

Witness is the core product. The delegate returns with sensory memories, spatial references, and emotionally vivid scenes. These details do not necessarily establish political truth, but they establish narrative authority. A story with concrete places, faces, and sensations feels more real than an abstract argument. The speaker can say, without needing to cite documents, "I stood there," "I met them," "I heard her," "I walked the site." Those phrases function like proof tokens.

They are not proof in the academic sense; they are proof in the social sense, the kind that convinces ordinary communities.

Pilgrimage also produces moral credibility through perceived cost. A trip to a conflict-adjacent region can be framed as risk-bearing: not necessarily physical danger, but reputational danger, emotional burden, or spiritual weight. The leader can present the journey as an act of compassion and courage. The congregation often reads cost as sincerity. If the leader paid a price, the leader is less likely to be dismissed as merely performing.

There is also an implicit hierarchy of knowledge at play. Firsthand presence is treated as epistemically superior to mediated information. This creates a two-tier system: those who "have been there" and those who "only saw it on the news." That hierarchy can be used responsibly, as a call to humility about distant judgments. But it can also be used aggressively, as a way to silence dissent: "You cannot criticize because you were not there." This is why pilgrimage can both illuminate and distort. It increases felt reality, but it can also decrease openness to alternative accounts.

The production of moral credibility is not necessarily manipulative. It is often sincere. Many travelers return genuinely shaken, grieving, and resolved. The question for analysis is not whether the emotion is real; it is how real emotion becomes a transferable asset in public persuasion. In a thousand pulpits, emotion becomes message, and message becomes posture, and posture becomes communal identity.

3.3 The boundary problem: pastoral testimony versus partisan alignment

The boundary problem is where commissioning becomes controversial. Pastors have a vocation oriented toward spiritual formation, moral teaching, care for suffering, and proclamation of faith. Politics has a logic oriented toward power, coalition, and contestation. When a pastor speaks as a witness to suffering, many hear it as legitimate pastoral care. When a pastor speaks in ways that function as partisan alignment, many hear it as a breach of pastoral neutrality or an instrumentalization of the pulpit.

The difficulty is that the boundary is not fixed. It is negotiated inside each community. Some congregations expect pastors to address geopolitical events and see it as obedience to moral duty. Others see it as corruption of the gospel by worldly power. The same speech can be heard as prophetic courage or partisan capture.

Commissioning intensifies the boundary problem because it reframes a political topic as a vocational obligation. That can produce at least three tensions.

First, the tension between compassion and certainty. Pastoral speech about suffering can be deeply appropriate. But when compassion is paired with high certainty about contested facts, it

can become overreach. The pastoral impulse to comfort can slide into the political impulse to declare. Commissioning may accelerate that slide because it encourages public speaking even when the speaker lacks full informational context.

Second, the tension between solidarity and universality. Christian ethics emphasizes concern for all human beings, including enemies and strangers. Solidarity trips focus attention on one community's suffering. That focus can be morally necessary and corrective, especially when a community is being dehumanized. Yet it can also narrow moral vision if it produces selective empathy. The congregational question becomes: does this solidarity expand our compassion or redirect it into tribal loyalty?

Third, the tension between witness and advocacy. Witness is narrating what one saw and felt. Advocacy is calling people to specific political conclusions or actions. Pastors can legitimately advocate for justice and peace. But when the advocacy maps tightly onto a partisan agenda, congregants may feel coerced rather than shepherded. The pulpit's moral authority then becomes a lever in political mobilization.

A neutrality standard for pastoral speech does not require silence. It requires clarity about what is being claimed. A pastor can say: I wept, I prayed, I saw grief, I felt solidarity. That is testimony. A pastor can also say: therefore you must adopt a particular set of policy positions, vote a certain way, or distrust those who disagree. That is not testimony; that is political alignment. The boundary problem becomes acute when the second is smuggled into the first under the cover of commissioning.

The deeper issue is not merely political. It is epistemic and pastoral. Commissioning increases a leader's felt obligation to speak. But it does not automatically increase their obligation to speak carefully. The most ethical use of commissioning is therefore coupled to restraint: distinguishing what is known from what is inferred, blessing compassion without weaponizing it, and preserving space for conscientious disagreement inside the body of believers.

4. Narrative Frames and Rhetorical Toolkits

The success of an "ambassador" delegation depends less on what happened on any single day of travel and more on what kind of story can be told after return. Stories that spread across networks tend to share a few properties: they are morally legible, emotionally vivid, and easy to repeat without losing their force. Narrative frames and rhetorical toolkits are the mechanisms that make that possible. They are not necessarily cynical scripts. They are often sincere ways of making sense of suffering. But they still function as tools: they compress complexity into transmissible meaning, and they stabilize a community's stance toward contested events.

Across public reporting and post-trip testimony, four frames recur with particular force: solidarity-through-witness, antisemitism-as-crisis, theology-as-structure, and firsthand-presence-as-credential. Each of these frames can be used responsibly or irresponsibly, gently or coercively, inclusively or tribally. The point of analysis is not to moralize the frame itself, but to describe how it works.

4.1 Solidarity, survival, and trauma memory as public arguments

Solidarity is a moral posture presented as action. It says: you are not alone; your suffering is seen; your enemies do not get the last word. In the delegation context, solidarity is often performed through presence: showing up, walking the sites, meeting survivors, praying with families, visiting memorials. That embodied presence is then translated into language that functions as a public argument back home.

The central rhetorical move is to convert trauma memory into moral obligation. The story is not merely that trauma happened; it is that trauma imposes duties on those who hear about it. These duties may include speaking publicly, rejecting dehumanizing narratives, resisting indifference, supporting a community under threat, or confronting forms of hatred that surface domestically. The delegate becomes a carrier of memory across borders. They present themselves as entrusted with a burden: I saw it; therefore I must not let it be minimized.

The “survival” element intensifies the argument by framing the conflict as existential rather than political. Survival rhetoric is not the language of policy tradeoffs; it is the language of life-and-death necessity. When survival is emphasized, compromise becomes harder to imagine and criticism becomes easier to interpret as hostility. This is why survival framing can be powerful but also polarizing. It can correct complacency and restore empathy, but it can also reduce the space for nuance by recoding disagreement as threat.

A final component is the personalization of grief. Delegates often retell a single encounter, a single widow’s voice, a single memorial, a single face. A personalized story does something that statistics cannot: it creates a moral relationship between speaker and listener. Listeners are not asked merely to “support Israel” as an abstraction; they are asked to care about a mother, a family, a child. That personalization is a rhetorical accelerant. It shifts the audience from analysis to identification.

Used carefully, this frame is a disciplined insistence on human reality. Used carelessly, it can become a moral wedge: if you do not agree with my conclusions, you do not care about the victims. The public argument rests on trauma memory; the ethical risk is trauma being used to foreclose legitimate moral and political deliberation.

4.2 Antisemitism as a mobilizing frame: diagnosis, attribution, and remedies

Antisemitism, in this narrative ecosystem, functions as both diagnosis and rallying cry. It supplies a moral clarity that helps unify audiences: most decent people reject hatred; therefore the task becomes recognizing hatred when it is disguised or newly expressed. As a mobilizing frame, antisemitism does three jobs: it identifies a present danger, it names a set of perpetrators or enabling structures, and it proposes remedies that are often actionable in domestic contexts.

Diagnosis typically emphasizes acceleration and mainstreaming: antisemitism is not rare, not fringe, and not safely contained. It is depicted as rising and adapting, often presenting itself through anti-Israel rhetoric, conspiracy narratives, or dehumanizing slogans. The frame pushes listeners to interpret certain public behaviors as not merely political speech but as moral failure and spiritual threat.

Attribution is where the frame becomes contested. Some accounts cast antisemitism primarily as a left-wing campus and activist phenomenon. Others cast it as a multi-directional danger that includes far-right conspiracy culture. Still others emphasize imported conflict dynamics and online algorithmic amplification. The effectiveness of the frame increases when attribution is simple; the accuracy increases when attribution is complex. Delegation rhetoric often leans toward simplicity because simplicity travels.

Remedies are commonly framed as both spiritual and civic. Spiritually, believers are urged to repent of indifference, confront prejudice, and teach congregations to reject hatred. Civically, remedies may include public statements, interfaith outreach, education campaigns, and political support for Israel. Sometimes remedies include more assertive forms of mobilization: shaping voting behavior, pressuring institutions, or treating pro-Israel alignment as a litmus test for moral seriousness.

The ethical problem is not the recognition of antisemitism. The problem is the temptation to convert a valid moral diagnosis into a blunt instrument. If “antisemitism” becomes a label applied to all disagreement, it loses diagnostic precision and becomes an enforcement mechanism. Conversely, if antisemitism is defined so narrowly that only one ideological tribe can be guilty, the frame becomes propaganda rather than discernment. A rigorous analysis therefore separates the moral core of the frame from its rhetorical uses.

4.3 Theology as infrastructure: covenant stories, eschatology, and continuity claims

For evangelical audiences, theology is not an ornament added to politics. It is infrastructure: the underlying system that determines what counts as morally real. Delegation narratives often draw power from their ability to place present events inside a long continuity story that begins in Scripture and extends through history.

Covenant stories provide the strongest continuity claims. They frame Israel not simply as a modern nation-state but as a people and a promise embedded in divine narrative. This can be expressed in many ways: the faithfulness of God across time, the survival of the Jewish people as evidence of providence, the moral duty of Christians to honor God's commitments, and the belief that blessing Israel has spiritual consequences. In this frame, support is not primarily strategic; it is obedience.

Eschatology adds urgency. Even when specific end-times timelines are not explicitly invoked, eschatological sensibility can still shape tone: this matters now; neutrality is impossible; history is converging. That urgency is a powerful mobilizer. It turns geopolitical interpretation into spiritual discernment. It also can reduce tolerance for complexity, because the point is not to debate policy; the point is to stand on the right side of a cosmic story.

Continuity claims link then to now: ancient Israel to modern Israel, biblical enemies to contemporary enemies, prophetic warnings to modern threats. Continuity can function as a meaning-making tool, helping believers locate themselves morally. But it also carries an interpretive risk: when continuity is asserted too directly, it can collapse the distinction between scripture and modern politics, turning complex historical realities into a simplified typology. That typology can be rhetorically effective, but it can also mislead and dehumanize.

Theological infrastructure also shapes what is excluded. A frame that emphasizes covenant and survival may unintentionally mute competing theological imperatives: justice for all, love of enemy, humility about human institutions, and the refusal to baptize any state as fully righteous. The most mature version of theological framing therefore includes self-limiting clauses: we affirm covenant without idolizing power; we practice solidarity without denying others' humanity; we speak boldly without claiming omniscience.

4.4 The "see it yourself" epistemology: firsthand presence as truth credential

A recurring rhetorical move in post-trip messaging is the elevation of firsthand presence as an epistemic credential. The core claim is simple: mediated information is unreliable; therefore you should trust those who have been there. This is a powerful move in an era of distrust in institutions, partisan media fragmentation, and algorithmic rage cycles. It offers an accessible alternative to "fact-checking": the witness becomes the verification device.

This epistemology has three attractive features. First, it feels democratic. Anyone can, in principle, go and see. Second, it feels embodied. Truth is grounded in physical reality rather than abstract debate. Third, it feels relational. Truth is tied to meeting people, hearing stories, and facing grief up close.

But it also has structural weaknesses. Being there does not guarantee comprehensive knowledge. Delegations are guided, schedules are curated, and encounters are shaped by what

hosts choose to show. Firsthand presence can produce deep empathy and genuine understanding, but it can also produce an illusion of total comprehension: I was there for a week; therefore I understand the whole conflict. That is not a moral failure; it is a cognitive trap.

The “see it yourself” frame also creates a hierarchy that can silence dissent. If you disagree, you can be told you are ignorant because you were not present. This shifts the argument from evidence to status: the credentialed witness outranks the distant critic. The frame can therefore function as soft censorship, even without any explicit intent.

A more responsible version of firsthand epistemology would treat presence as a corrective to dehumanization, not as a replacement for careful knowledge. It would say: I saw grief; therefore I reject dehumanizing narratives. It would not say: I saw grief; therefore my policy conclusions are unchallengeable.

As a communication technology, the “see it yourself” credential is extremely efficient. It converts travel into authority and authority into portable truth. The analytical task is to describe this conversion without assuming it is either inherently manipulative or inherently pure. Like most rhetorical tools, it can carry compassion and distortion at the same time.

5. Network Effects: From Summit Stage to Local Pulpits

The practical question is not whether a summit moved the hearts of its attendees; many events do that. The practical question is whether a summit becomes a sustained communications phenomenon. In an “ambassador” model, success is measured by propagation: how quickly and widely the narrative travels, how long it persists, and how strongly it reshapes community interpretation of subsequent events. Because evangelical ecosystems are built on routinized weekly gatherings and dense relational networks, they are unusually well-suited to narrative diffusion. A thousand attendees can generate not merely a thousand retellings, but tens of thousands of repeated iterations as pastors preach, teach, interview, and circulate content through layered media channels.

Network effects arise when a story is designed to be retold, when it is easy to integrate into existing sermon structures, and when retelling is socially rewarded. The summit-to-pulpit pipeline works when the message is not a one-time testimony but a reusable template that can attach to many future news cycles.

5.1 Sermon diffusion: how a story becomes a repeatable weekly message

Sermon diffusion is the process by which a discrete event becomes a stable theme. Pastors rarely have the luxury of speaking about only one topic; they must interpret Scripture week

after week while shepherding a congregation through ordinary life. For a summit narrative to persist, it must be metabolized into sermon-ready forms.

The first transformation is from experience to motif. A pastor returns with a handful of vivid scenes: a memorial site, a survivor's account, a conversation, a moment of prayer. Those scenes become motifs that can be inserted into multiple sermons as illustrations. Once a motif exists, it is no longer tied to the week of travel. It becomes a portable piece of moral imagery that can be used whenever the pastor addresses themes like evil, suffering, courage, hatred, forgiveness, covenant, or spiritual warfare.

The second transformation is from motif to liturgy. Pastors may incorporate new recurring practices: prayers for Israel, prayers against antisemitism, prayers for hostages, commemorations, or teaching series on biblical passages related to Israel. When prayer or teaching becomes routinized, the narrative becomes part of congregational habit, not merely memory.

The third transformation is from story to interpretive schema. The pastor is not only telling what happened; the pastor is teaching the congregation how to interpret news. In this stage, the sermon provides a lens: when you hear certain claims, interpret them as misinformation; when you see certain protests, interpret them as hatred; when you see certain political moves, interpret them as survival. This schema is where diffusion becomes deep. Once an interpretive schema is installed, it can organize future perceptions with minimal further persuasion.

Sermon diffusion also benefits from the economics of attention. Churches already gather people weekly. The pastor has a captive audience in the literal sense of sustained, repeated exposure. Few institutions outside religious life have this form of built-in repetition. Even if a pastor only spends two minutes per sermon referencing the trip, the repetition accumulates across months.

Finally, diffusion is accelerated by peer validation. When pastors know other pastors are saying similar things, the message feels socially safe and spiritually mainstream. This produces convergence without central coordination. It also produces a subtle competition: who can tell the most compelling version of the story, who can offer the strongest moral clarity, who can demonstrate courage in speaking.

5.2 Social amplification: podcasts, clips, newsletters, and influencer relays

The modern pulpit is no longer limited to Sunday. A key reason these delegations can have outsized impact is that evangelical communication has become hybrid: church services, livestreams, sermon clips, interviews, podcasts, donor emails, and short social videos. A summit narrative designed for diffusion will exploit each of these channels.

Podcasts and interviews turn testimony into a long-form product. A pastor can speak with nuance, emotion, and detail, building credibility and creating "shareable authority." Listeners who do not attend the church can still become part of the narrative audience. That expands the network beyond local congregations into national and denominational ecosystems.

Clips turn long-form into virality. A two-hour testimony can be condensed into a thirty-second segment that carries maximum emotional charge: a single sentence about grief, a single statement about truth, a single warning about hatred. These clips travel faster than sermons because they fit into algorithmic environments. They are also more likely to be stripped of context, which increases both their reach and their risk.

Newsletters and donor emails convert narrative into action. A pastor or ministry leader can connect the story to practical steps: donations, petitions, letters to representatives, attendance at events, support for partner ministries, or "education" campaigns. The narrative becomes not merely a story but a mobilization engine.

Influencer relays amplify across overlapping audiences. When recognizable leaders share one another's content, a narrative crosses network boundaries. A pastor shares a podcast, a broadcaster clips it, an advocacy group repackages it, and local churches replay it. Each relay increases the story's perceived legitimacy because it appears in multiple trusted places. The story stops being "one person's experience" and becomes "what everyone is saying."

This amplification cycle produces a distinct pattern: high emotional intensity at the center, broad distribution at the edges, and gradual normalization through repetition. Over time, the narrative becomes the default moral language in the network, while dissenting interpretations become socially costly or suspicious.

5.3 Congregational reception: persuasion, backlash, fatigue, and moral injury

Congregations are not uniform audiences. A single church can contain multiple political identities, media diets, generational cultures, and theological sensibilities. That means reception is not a single effect but a distribution of effects.

Persuasion occurs most readily when the narrative aligns with pre-existing commitments. Many evangelicals already hold strong theological and cultural reasons for supporting Israel. For them, the pastor's testimony functions as reinforcement: it deepens emotional conviction and supplies fresh details to defend their stance in conversation. Persuasion also occurs through trust transfer: if I trust my pastor on spiritual matters, I may trust their geopolitical framing as well, even if I would not trust a politician or cable news host.

Backlash emerges when congregants perceive the pulpit is being used to deliver partisan messaging. Even if the pastor intends pastoral witness, listeners may hear political alignment.

Backlash can be silent: people stop attending, stop giving, or disengage emotionally while staying physically present. It can also be vocal: complaints, meetings with elders, social media criticism, or factional tension.

Fatigue is a subtler effect. Repeated exposure to conflict narratives can exhaust congregants, especially those already burdened by domestic anxieties. Some people respond by numbing out, which can look like indifference but is often a coping response. Fatigue can reduce empathy and increase irritability, leading congregants to reject further messaging not because they disagree, but because they cannot bear additional moral pressure.

Moral injury is a deeper spiritual and psychological harm that can occur when people feel trapped between competing moral demands. A congregant may feel compassion for Israeli victims and simultaneously compassion for Palestinian civilians; or they may feel obligated to support Israel while also disturbed by certain images or policies; or they may feel pressure to conform publicly while privately uncertain. When a church environment frames one stance as the only faithful stance, morally conflicted congregants can experience shame, alienation, or spiritual disorientation. In that sense, even sincere solidarity messaging can unintentionally injure the consciences of those who cannot reconcile the narrative with their own moral intuitions.

The reception landscape is therefore not simply "support increased." It includes widening gaps between the persuaded, the quietly alienated, the fatigued, and the morally wounded. Pastoral skill is required to avoid turning testimony into coercion.

5.4 Generational divergence: younger evangelicals, media ecosystems, and trust erosion

Generational divergence is one of the most consequential network effects because it shapes whether the narrative persists for decades or burns out as a temporary mobilization. Younger evangelicals, broadly speaking, inhabit different media ecosystems than older congregants. They are more likely to encounter global conflict through social platforms, peer networks, and activist content rather than through church-centric media or legacy news. They are also more likely to interpret identity-based solidarity through a justice framework that highlights power asymmetries, civilian suffering, and humanitarian concerns.

This does not mean younger evangelicals are uniformly anti-Israel; it means the interpretive default is different. Where older audiences may prioritize covenant continuity and survival framing, younger audiences may prioritize human rights framing and suspicion of state power. These frames can coexist, but they often collide in the same church.

Trust erosion intensifies divergence. Younger believers frequently exhibit lower baseline trust in institutions, including churches, denominations, and political parties. If they perceive the pulpit as adopting a geopolitical script, they may interpret it as institutional capture rather than

prophetic clarity. Once that perception takes hold, the damage is not limited to one issue; it can metastasize into a general suspicion of pastoral authority.

Media fragmentation compounds this. In a single week, a younger congregant may see a stream of graphic clips, activist arguments, and peer commentary that frames Israel primarily through occupation, bombing, or humanitarian catastrophe. They then hear a sermon that frames Israel primarily through survival, antisemitism, and covenant duty. The mismatch can feel like gaslighting, even when the pastor is acting in good faith. The congregant may conclude that the church is selectively seeing reality, which becomes a crisis of epistemic trust.

The ambassador model can therefore generate a paradox. It aims to stabilize narrative across a network, but in doing so it may accelerate generational strain inside local congregations. A narrative that is rhetorically effective for older audiences can be counterproductive for younger audiences if it appears to deny what they see online or dismiss their moral concerns.

A sustainable approach would require not only message repetition but epistemic humility: acknowledging partial knowledge, affirming compassion for all civilians, distinguishing theological commitments from policy certainty, and preserving room for conscientious disagreement. Without those safeguards, network diffusion may succeed in the short term while deepening long-term trust erosion, especially among younger evangelicals who already feel that the church is too closely allied with partisan identity.

6. Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Without Treaties

Public diplomacy is often imagined as something states do with press briefings, cultural exchanges, and official messaging. But in a fragmented media era, states and state-adjacent organizations increasingly pursue influence through decentralized, high-trust networks that sit outside formal diplomacy. The “ambassador” model is a clean example. It does not primarily negotiate with another government. It cultivates interpreters who can shape the beliefs, emotions, and moral posture of their own publics. The “diplomatic” outcome is indirect: shift domestic legitimacy and narrative climate so that certain foreign-policy stances become easier to sustain and opposing stances become socially costly.

Strategic communication in this setting is not about saying more; it is about placing a message inside a vessel that can travel. The vessel is the pastor, the influencer, the advocacy leader, the broadcaster, the local church network, the weekly sermon habit, and the social media relay system. A treaty binds governments; a narrative binds populations. And populations—especially democratic populations—are the ground in which foreign policy either grows or fails.

6.1 The ambassador model as decentralized public diplomacy

The ambassador model functions as decentralized public diplomacy by outsourcing the distribution of a state-aligned narrative to non-state actors who already command legitimacy in their communities. The model has several structural advantages.

First, it reduces the credibility problem that official messaging often faces. Government statements, especially in polarizing contexts, are discounted as propaganda. Pastoral testimony, by contrast, is perceived as personal and morally grounded. Even when it is aligned with state interests, it arrives wearing the clothing of conscience rather than policy.

Second, it creates redundancy and resilience. A centralized messaging campaign can be disrupted by a scandal, a policy failure, or an abrupt news cycle shift. A decentralized campaign persists because it is carried by many independent speakers. Even if some voices drop out, others remain. The narrative becomes distributed across thousands of channels and is therefore harder to extinguish.

Third, it leverages homophily. People trust and imitate those who feel like "their people." A pastor speaking to a congregation shares cultural vocabulary, moral assumptions, and relational bonds with that audience. This increases persuasion efficiency. The message does not need to cross a cultural gap because it is delivered inside the audience's own cultural home.

Fourth, it transforms public diplomacy into community formation. The program does not merely inform; it creates a shared identity: we are supporters, witnesses, ambassadors. Identity is stickier than information. Once a person's self-concept is tied to a position, counter-information often strengthens rather than weakens the position because it is perceived as attack.

In effect, the ambassador model is "foreign policy messaging" designed to behave like a religious movement: relational, routinized, morally serious, and identity-based.

6.2 Why pastors are unusually high-leverage nodes

Pastors are high-leverage communication nodes for reasons that are simultaneously sociological, psychological, and institutional.

Sociologically, pastors occupy a role in which people expect moral interpretation. A political pundit competes for attention; a pastor inherits attention through the institution of congregational life. A congregation gathers weekly, often for years, often across generations. The pastor's voice becomes familiar, and familiarity breeds trust. That trust is a form of social capital that can be deployed to frame events far beyond the congregation's immediate life.

Psychologically, pastors benefit from a trust-transfer mechanism. Many congregants grant pastors credibility in spiritual matters—meaning, purpose, moral duty, human dignity. When a

pastor speaks about geopolitics using moral language, the credibility often transfers. The congregant may not have evaluated the pastor's geopolitical expertise, but the pastor's integrity and spiritual authority can function as a substitute for expertise.

Institutionally, churches are built for repetition. Repetition is persuasion's engine. A message repeated weekly becomes normal. It becomes what "our church believes," which often matters more than what any individual believes in isolation. Pastors also have multiple channels: sermons, Bible studies, newsletters, pastoral counseling, small groups, and increasingly livestreams and clips. This is an unusually dense media stack, operated by a single trusted voice.

Finally, pastors are high-leverage because they can fuse cognition and emotion. They can present facts, interpret them morally, evoke empathy, invoke Scripture, and call for action—all in one act of communication. Most modern institutions separate these functions: journalists report, activists mobilize, therapists care. Pastors can integrate them, which makes their messages more totalizing and therefore more durable.

This leverage is morally ambiguous. It can be used to deepen compassion and truthfulness. It can also be used to harden tribal loyalties and suppress legitimate moral disagreement. The leverage itself is neutral; the use is what matters.

6.3 Soft power metrics: attention, sentiment, donor behavior, and institutional partnerships

Because this model aims at narrative rather than treaty, the relevant measurements are soft-power indicators. These are not perfect metrics, but they provide a way to evaluate whether the campaign is working beyond anecdote.

Attention metrics track whether the narrative is being heard. Examples include sermon views, livestream reach, clip shares, podcast downloads, conference attendance, newsletter open rates, and the number of churches that host Israel-related events after the trip. Attention is the first gate; nothing else happens without it.

Sentiment metrics track how audiences feel and what attitudes harden. This can be approximated through survey work inside congregations, social media sentiment analysis around key phrases, comment-section content, or shifts in language used by church leaders over time. The point is not to measure "support" in a simplistic way, but to measure emotional direction: empathy, anger, fear, certainty, openness to complexity.

Donor behavior is a particularly strong indicator because it reveals whether narratives convert into costly action. If congregants increase donations to pro-Israel ministries, humanitarian organizations, advocacy groups, or related political causes, that suggests the narrative has become motivating rather than merely informative. Donor data can also reveal segmentation:

some audiences respond to humanitarian framing, others to survival framing, others to theological framing.

Institutional partnerships track whether the program generates long-term organizational alignment. Examples include new relationships between churches and Israeli institutions, recurring trips, joint events with advocacy groups, partnerships between churches and media outlets, or invitations for delegates to speak at other churches. These partnerships create infrastructure: they make future narrative diffusion easier and increase the "stickiness" of the ambassador identity.

A rigorous evaluation approach would treat these metrics as layered: attention enables sentiment shift; sentiment shift enables donor action; donor action enables institutional partnerships; institutional partnerships enable long-term persistence. The model works best when it builds a feedback loop between these layers.

6.4 Counter-messaging dynamics and the risk of polarization feedback

No narrative campaign operates in a vacuum. The ambassador model enters a contested information environment where counter-messages are already circulating. In fact, the model often presumes a hostile environment; it frames itself as a response to misinformation, antisemitism, or moral confusion. That presumption makes counter-messaging dynamics central.

Counter-messaging can take multiple forms. Some of it disputes facts and frames, emphasizing Palestinian suffering, criticizing military actions, or challenging theological claims. Some of it attacks the credibility of the delegates, portraying them as manipulated or politically co-opted. Some of it targets the church itself, accusing it of moral hypocrisy or colonial theology. Counter-messaging can also emerge from within the church: younger congregants, minority members, or politically heterodox believers who resist a uniform narrative.

Polarization feedback occurs when each side's messaging becomes evidence for the other side's fears. If delegates speak with high certainty and moral absolutism, critics interpret it as propaganda and respond more aggressively. That aggression then becomes proof, for the delegates' audience, that they are right to see an information war and a hostile world. The cycle intensifies. Each side's reaction justifies the other side's escalation.

Several mechanisms amplify polarization feedback.

First, identity fusion: when a stance becomes part of religious identity, criticism feels like persecution. That makes moderation feel like betrayal.

Second, algorithmic incentives: outrage and certainty travel faster than humility and complexity. Clips that are most polarizing are the clips most likely to spread, even when they are not representative of the speaker's full message.

Third, trust collapse: when audiences no longer share epistemic authorities, disagreements become insoluble. The pastor says, "I was there." The critic says, "You were shown a curated narrative." Both may be partly right. But without shared standards for evidence, the argument becomes a clash of status and identity rather than a search for truth.

The risk is not merely political polarization; it is pastoral fragmentation. Churches can split not only over policy but over reality itself—over what counts as credible, what counts as compassionate, what counts as faithful. In that environment, the ambassador model may achieve short-term mobilization while increasing long-term fracture.

A careful strategic-communication posture would therefore treat counter-messaging as a normal feature, not a sign of evil, and would inoculate against polarization feedback by building explicit safeguards into post-trip speech: clarify what is known versus inferred, affirm universal human dignity, resist totalizing claims, and preserve room for disagreement without moral condemnation. Without those safeguards, decentralized public diplomacy can drift into decentralized culture war—a high-energy system that sustains itself by conflict rather than by truth.

7. Ethical and Pastoral Tensions

Any program that invites pastors to act as "ambassadors" necessarily draws pastoral authority into a contested political field. This is not automatically wrong. Pastors have always addressed public moral questions: war, peace, oppression, hatred, and human dignity. But the ambassador model intensifies the stakes because it links pastoral speech to a structured influence pipeline: curated encounter, commissioning language, and an expectation of return messaging. The ethical question therefore becomes not "Should pastors care?" but "How should pastors care without surrendering the distinct moral and spiritual character of their office?"

The tensions in this chapter do not assume bad faith. They assume ordinary human limits: incomplete knowledge, emotional overwhelm, social pressure, and the temptation toward certainty when surrounded by grief and urgency. A pastor can return sincerely brokenhearted and still do harm through overconfident framing. Conversely, a pastor can return cautious and nuanced and still be accused of betrayal. Ethical tensions arise precisely because the issues are morally heavy and the audiences are divided.

7.1 Shepherding amid geopolitics: spiritual care under high political temperature

Shepherding is spiritual care in conditions of fragility. Geopolitics raises the temperature because it touches identity, fear, media addiction, and moral outrage. When a pastor brings Israel–Palestine or antisemitism discourse into the pulpit, congregants do not hear it as mere information; they hear it as a signal of where the church stands, who belongs, and what kinds of questions are permitted.

At high temperature, pastoral communication must manage multiple forms of suffering at once. There is direct compassion for victims abroad. There is fear among congregants who sense social instability. There is anger among those who believe their moral tribe is under attack. There is confusion among those who cannot sort competing narratives. There is shame among those who disagree with the dominant church posture. There is also the quiet pain of people who have personal histories—trauma, discrimination, war experiences—that get reactivated by graphic stories and heated rhetoric.

Ethically, shepherding requires the pastor to stay oriented to the congregation's spiritual health, not only to the moral urgency of the news. This creates a difficult pastoral paradox: silence can feel like complicity, but speech can feel like coercion. The answer is not a universal rule. The answer is a pastoral method: speak in ways that care for the conscience, not only in ways that mobilize the will.

A care-centered approach would prioritize spiritual outcomes: increased compassion without decreased humility, increased courage without decreased gentleness, increased clarity without decreased love for those who disagree. If those outcomes cannot be reasonably expected under current conditions, it may be wise to slow down, widen the frame, and explicitly acknowledge uncertainty rather than forcing a high-certainty stance into a fragile community.

7.2 Instrumentalization risks: when pastoral authority is used as a means

Instrumentalization is the ethical hazard of treating persons as tools. In this context, it appears when pastoral authority is valued primarily for what it can accomplish politically rather than for what it is spiritually. A pastor is not merely a megaphone; the pastor is a steward of souls. When a pastor becomes a means to an external objective—votes, donations, public pressure, institutional alignment—the spiritual office is at risk of becoming a delivery system for worldly power.

Instrumentalization can occur in at least four ways.

First, through role redefinition. If the pastor begins to see their primary identity as activist-ambassador rather than shepherd-teacher, the church's center of gravity shifts. The pulpit becomes a campaign stage, and the congregation becomes an audience of mobilizable units.

Second, through selective empathy. When the narrative is structured to maximize solidarity with one community while leaving other suffering unaddressed, pastoral care risks becoming tribal. The pastor may not intend this, but the effect can be that compassion becomes conditional: compassion is granted to those inside the frame and withheld from those outside it. That is spiritual deformation.

Third, through coercive moral framing. If dissent is treated as moral failure, congregants may feel forced to perform agreement to remain in good standing. That turns the church into a conformity system. Even if the pastor believes the stance is correct, coercion undermines spiritual freedom and damages trust.

Fourth, through transactional rhetoric. When testimony is regularly followed by calls for donations or political actions, the audience may begin to suspect that grief is being used. Even if the call is legitimate, the pairing can feel exploitative. The pastor must therefore be exceptionally careful about sequencing and transparency: why is this being asked, and who benefits?

The core ethical principle is simple: the pastor must never treat the congregation as a political resource to be harvested. The pastor must treat the congregation as persons to be formed in love and truth. If political actions arise, they should arise as fruit of conscience, not as an extraction from authority.

7.3 Discernment and verification norms: claims, images, and narrative certainty

In a high-conflict environment, misinformation, miscaptioned images, and emotionally manipulative content are pervasive. Delegations can unintentionally amplify this problem. Firsthand witness creates an aura of certainty: the delegate feels they “know what is going on.” But knowledge gained through a curated itinerary is partial. It is deep in empathy but narrow in scope. The ethical task is to match confidence to evidence.

Pastoral discernment needs explicit verification norms. Without them, the church becomes vulnerable to adopting and spreading claims that later prove wrong, which erodes credibility and can harden cynicism.

A disciplined approach would include at least four norms.

First, source humility. A pastor should explicitly distinguish between what they directly observed, what they were told by hosts, what they infer, and what they merely heard online. These are not equal categories. Confusing them produces false certainty.

Second, image skepticism. Images are powerful, but in modern media they are also easily weaponized. Pastors should avoid sharing graphic imagery or viral claims unless they have high

confidence in provenance and context. When in doubt, the pastoral instinct should favor restraint. The church does not need to be first; it needs to be true.

Third, narrative completeness awareness. A pastor should recognize that curated experiences often highlight certain truths while leaving others invisible. That does not make them false. It makes them partial. Ethical speech admits partiality without denying reality.

Fourth, downstream impact evaluation. Before repeating a claim, a pastor should ask: if this is wrong, what harm will it cause? The harm may be reputational, relational, or spiritual. A claim that inflames hatred or dehumanizes a group carries a high harm burden and therefore demands a higher verification threshold.

The goal is not paralysis. The goal is truthfulness that honors the gravity of the pulpit. A pastor can speak compassionately about suffering without claiming to possess comprehensive geopolitical knowledge. In fact, that modesty can increase credibility rather than decrease it.

7.4 Responsibilities after return: humility, precision, and harm minimization

After return, pastors face an extended ethical season. The trip may have been a week, but its influence can last years. Responsibility therefore includes what is said, how it is said, and what is allowed to grow in the congregation as a result.

Humility is the first responsibility. Humility does not mean neutrality or moral apathy. It means refusing to speak as if one has omniscience. It means acknowledging complexity, confessing the limits of one's knowledge, and resisting the temptation to baptize any political actor as wholly righteous. Humility also means leaving room for other faithful believers to disagree without being treated as enemies.

Precision is the second responsibility. Precision in this setting is spiritual care. When a pastor is precise about what they know and what they do not know, they protect the congregation's conscience. Precision includes careful use of terms like antisemitism, genocide, terrorism, occupation, and self-defense. These words carry moral and legal weight. Using them loosely can inflame conflict inside the church and can diminish the church's credibility outside it.

Harm minimization is the third responsibility. Pastors must anticipate how their words will land on vulnerable people in the room. In any congregation there may be Jews, Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims, interfaith families, immigrants, trauma survivors, veterans, and young people already alienated from church politics. The pastor's job is not to avoid hard truths; it is to tell hard truths without turning the church into a place where the vulnerable feel targeted or erased.

Harm minimization includes practical moves: avoiding contempt language, refusing dehumanizing labels, emphasizing prayer for all victims, condemning hatred consistently across ideological lines, and making space for lament. Lament is often the most pastorally faithful

response when moral clarity about suffering does not translate into easy political clarity. Lament allows the church to carry grief without rushing to simplistic conclusions.

Finally, responsibility includes cultivating maturity rather than mobilizing heat. The ambassador model can easily reward heat: the most intense stories get the most attention. Pastors must resist being reshaped by the attention economy. Their goal is not to win the algorithm. Their goal is to form people who can withstand the algorithm: people who can mourn, discern, love enemies, resist hatred, and remain truthful without becoming cruel.

In this sense, the ethical test of the ambassador model is not whether it creates louder voices. It is whether it creates wiser churches.

8. Methods and Data Plan for the 3,500-Word Expansion

The 3,500-word expansion should be built to withstand two predictable critiques. One critique will be political: "You're smuggling an agenda." The other critique will be epistemic: "You can't know what the program really did without internal documents." The method must therefore be bounded, explicit about uncertainty, and designed to produce descriptive clarity rather than ideological victory. The goal is to reconstruct the ambassador model as an observable system: inputs, procedures, rhetorical outputs, diffusion channels, and measurable downstream signals.

This section outlines a practical research design that a single investigator could execute without privileged access. It combines qualitative frame analysis, basic network mapping, and modest quantification of diffusion signals. The central commitment is transparency: define what counts as evidence, separate observation from inference, and state limitations upfront so the paper's claims remain proportionate to what can be shown.

8.1 Source types: speeches, interviews, sermons, church posts, and participant testimonies

The primary dataset should be built from publicly accessible artifacts produced before, during, and after the delegation. A useful strategy is to create a time-bounded corpus: from the first public promotional materials through a fixed post-return window (for example, 90 days after the trip). The objective is not exhaustive collection; it is representative sampling across the ecosystem's main channels.

Speech artifacts include formal addresses at the summit, commissioning remarks, and any published transcripts or official clips. These are high-value because they often articulate the explicit "meaning" of the program. They also reveal the official frame set offered to participants.

Interview artifacts include television segments, podcasts, local radio appearances, and ministry interviews. Interviews tend to capture the mid-level translation layer: how participants interpret

the trip for audiences that were not present. They also often contain repeated phrases that become diffusion markers.

Sermon artifacts include full services, sermon audio, sermon notes, and sermon clips published on church websites or social media. Sermons are crucial because they are the primary diffusion channel into a stable weekly audience. They also show how the story is integrated into Scripture teaching and pastoral exhortation.

Church posts include newsletters, blog entries, Facebook posts, Instagram reels, YouTube community posts, and X threads from churches and individual leaders. These sources capture the short-form, algorithm-facing diffusion layer. They also show what gets simplified, what gets highlighted, and what becomes a "shareable core."

Participant testimonies include written reflections, on-stage testimonies in home churches, small-group leader messages, and any "trip report" documents. Testimonies are especially valuable for mapping firsthand epistemology: how the credential of presence is invoked and how emotional scenes are converted into moral directives.

A minimal viable corpus for the expansion could be assembled as follows:

- Ten to twenty high-profile artifacts from central organizers and featured speakers.
- Twenty to forty post-return sermons or sermon segments by publicly identified participants and/or by churches that explicitly reference the delegation.
- Fifty to one hundred social posts and short clips collected across multiple platforms, sampled by engagement level and by diversity of sub-networks.

The corpus should be archived with dates, platform identifiers, speaker identity, and context notes. The paper should avoid asserting details that cannot be traced to a specific artifact in this corpus.

8.2 Coding schema for frames: solidarity, threat, theology, diplomacy, identity

Once the corpus exists, the core analytic work is frame coding. The aim is to identify repeated narrative patterns that function as transportable meaning. The coding should be simple enough to be consistent, but rich enough to capture meaningful variation.

A five-frame schema can be used as the primary lens, with optional sub-codes.

Solidarity frame: language emphasizing presence, empathy, shared grief, visiting sites, meeting families, standing with victims, prayer, and moral obligation to remember. Sub-codes include trauma memory, survivor encounter, lament, and compassion mandate.

Threat frame: language emphasizing existential danger, antisemitism as rising crisis, civilizational struggle, moral clarity against evil, and urgency to act. Sub-codes include misinformation/information war, dehumanization, and survival necessity.

Theology frame: language grounding claims in Scripture, covenant continuity, divine promises, prophecy, eschatological urgency, spiritual warfare, blessing/curse logic, or obedience as motive. Sub-codes include covenant, prophetic timeline hints, and universal ethics clauses (love of neighbor/enemy).

Diplomacy frame: language that positions delegates as ambassadors, truth-tellers, representatives, or bridge-builders, and that frames the trip as education or public diplomacy. Sub-codes include legitimacy markers (official access), training, and institutional partnerships.

Identity frame: language that signals in-group and out-group boundaries, loyalty tests, courage versus cowardice, "standing" as identity, and the moral status associated with alignment. Sub-codes include litmus test rhetoric, shame/accusation language, and identity fusion.

The coding process should include the following steps:

- First-pass tagging: mark which of the five frames appear in each artifact.
- Second-pass intensity scoring: assign a low/medium/high rating for each frame's prominence in that artifact.
- Third-pass phrase capture: record repeated phrases and metaphors that seem designed for repetition, such as "I was there," "tell the truth," "ambassadors," "never again," "information war," "stand with," or "cut out of the Bible" style claims.

The expansion should provide a short table or narrative summary describing which frames dominate which channels. For example: sermons may emphasize theology and solidarity; clips may emphasize threat and identity; interviews may emphasize diplomacy and firsthand epistemology.

8.3 Network mapping approach: node types, edges, and amplification measures

To move beyond rhetorical analysis into system analysis, the expansion should include a basic network mapping approach. The network here is not a claim about conspiratorial coordination. It is a descriptive map of who influences whom, and how messages travel.

Node types:

- Organizers: civil-society institutions and leaders who design the program.
- State-facing officials: political figures and ministries that confer legitimacy.

- Pastoral nodes: senior pastors and church leaders with stable weekly platforms.
- Influencer nodes: podcasters, broadcasters, authors, and media personalities.
- Advocacy nodes: political and legal mobilization groups and their leaders.
- Congregational nodes: churches, small groups, and denominational networks.

Edges:

- Content edges: a node shares or reposts another node's content.
- Appearance edges: a node appears on another node's platform (podcast, interview, church event).
- Endorsement edges: a node publicly affirms another node's framing or credential.
- Institutional edges: a node forms a partnership, hosts an event, or engages in coordinated programming.

Amplification measures:

Because most researchers won't have internal analytics, the plan should use publicly observable proxies:

- Reach proxies: views, likes, shares, reposts, comments, and download approximations where available.
- Velocity proxies: how quickly an artifact is reposted across networks in the first 7–14 days after publication.
- Persistence proxies: whether themes recur over multiple weeks or resurface during later news events.
- Cross-network spread: whether a message remains inside one sub-network or crosses into others.

A simple network diagram can be constructed even without advanced tools: list key nodes, record observed edges from the corpus, and annotate edges with evidence and date. The expansion can then narrate diffusion pathways: from organizers to featured speakers, from speakers to mid-tier pastors, from pastors to clips, from clips to broader influencer relays.

The value of network mapping is not precision; it is pattern recognition. It helps distinguish a one-off event from a coordinated diffusion phenomenon.

8.4 Limitations: incomplete rosters, selection bias, and platform opacity

A credible paper must treat limitations as central, not as a footnote. Four limitations are especially important.

Incomplete rosters. Without a full public list of delegates, the corpus will overrepresent public-facing leaders and underrepresent ordinary pastors who returned quietly. This biases the analysis toward high-amplification voices. The paper should explicitly state that it analyzes the publicly visible network, not the full population of attendees.

Selection bias. Participants who speak publicly after return may differ systematically from those who do not. They may be more politically engaged, more media-savvy, more ideologically aligned, or more emotionally activated. Therefore, post-return speech artifacts cannot be assumed representative. The expansion should describe findings as patterns within the visible subset.

Platform opacity. Social platforms hide key distribution data: algorithmic promotion, suppression, audience demographics, and cross-platform view duplication. Engagement metrics are imperfect proxies, and comparisons across platforms can be misleading. The paper should treat engagement as indicative rather than definitive.

Curation and context. Delegations are curated experiences. Even firsthand testimony can reflect what was shown and what was emphasized. This does not make testimony false; it makes it partial. The paper should avoid claims that imply comprehensive knowledge of “what really happened.” It should focus on observable outputs: the narratives that were produced and how they traveled.

A final limitation is interpretive risk. Frame coding can be misread as accusation. The paper should therefore maintain a consistent neutrality standard: it analyzes how messages work, not whether participants are morally sincere. It should also avoid mind-reading. It can say, “this rhetoric tends to have this effect,” without saying, “they intended this effect,” unless there is explicit evidence of intent.

With these methods and limitations stated clearly, the 3,500-word expansion can remain both rigorous and fair: it will not claim more than the data can support, but it will still produce a clear, useful description of how the ambassador model functions as strategic communication in modern evangelical networks.

9. Conclusion

The Friends of Zion-style “ambassador” model, as described through publicly visible artifacts, is not best understood as a one-time trip or even as a conference. It is better understood as a repeatable influence architecture that fuses religious vocation, moral witness, and modern media distribution into a form of public diplomacy that does not require treaties. The program’s success does not depend on persuading foreign ministries; it depends on shaping the interpretive environment of domestic publics. That is where modern diplomacy increasingly lives: in legitimacy, narrative, and the moral mood of populations.

This conclusion does not require cynicism about motives. Participants can be sincerely moved, sincerely grieving, sincerely convinced they are defending truth. Organizers can sincerely believe they are confronting hatred and misinformation. The analytical point is that sincerity and structure can coexist. A narrative system can be heartfelt and still be strategically designed. And because it is designed, it can be studied.

9.1 What the ambassador model reveals about religion, influence, and modern diplomacy

The model reveals that religion remains one of the most powerful remaining infrastructures for sustained influence, especially in societies with fragmented media and declining trust in institutions. Few domains offer what churches offer: routinized weekly gatherings, durable trust relationships, moral vocabulary, identity formation, and multi-channel distribution anchored in a single voice. When a pastor speaks, the message arrives inside a pre-existing covenant of trust. That is not a “platform” in the ordinary digital sense; it is a living social institution.

The model also reveals that modern diplomacy increasingly operates through civil society intermediaries. In a world where official state messaging is discounted as self-interested, states and state-aligned actors often gain more traction by equipping trusted non-state communicators to speak to their own people. The “ambassador” is less a diplomat to foreigners than a diplomat to fellow citizens. This is public diplomacy reoriented: not outward-facing to another public abroad, but inward-facing to the domestic public whose moral legitimacy ultimately sustains policy.

Finally, the model shows how the attention economy reshapes moral communication. Commissioning language, witness narratives, and curated experiences are not simply spiritual acts; they are conversion devices that turn lived experience into replicable content. The trip becomes a source of sermon illustrations, interview segments, and shareable clips. In this environment, the line between pastoral proclamation and strategic messaging becomes porous. That porosity can serve compassion and truth, but it can also accelerate polarization, especially when identity and certainty are rewarded more than humility and nuance.

In short, the ambassador model is a contemporary synthesis: religious authority plus experiential credential plus distributed media equals durable influence.

9.2 What remains uncertain without full participant disclosure and internal documents

Even a careful public-facing analysis will leave important questions unresolved. These unknowns matter because they determine whether the program is best interpreted as organic solidarity, organized persuasion, or some mixture of both.

First, selection criteria remain largely opaque. Without internal documents, it is difficult to know how participants were chosen: what thresholds of influence, ideological reliability, denomination, geography, demographic profile, or media readiness mattered most. Public claims about vetting and training may be accurate, but their operational meaning cannot be fully verified.

Second, content curation is difficult to reconstruct. What sites were emphasized, what voices were prioritized, what briefings were provided, and what "facts" were presented as central? Without schedules, briefing materials, and recordings of closed sessions, analysis must infer curation from post-trip speech. That introduces uncertainty about causality: did the summit create the frame, or did it select participants who already held the frame?

Third, the scale and funding details remain unclear from public artifacts alone. Cost structures, subsidies, institutional partnerships, and logistical support can change how the program should be interpreted. Financial transparency affects ethical evaluation: audiences interpret testimony differently if they believe the trip was fully self-funded versus substantially underwritten by interested parties.

Fourth, the downstream impact on congregations cannot be measured precisely without access to internal church data. Attendance changes, giving patterns, volunteer engagement, and membership retention are usually private. Public-facing engagement metrics are only proxies. This means we can observe narrative diffusion, but we can only estimate its effects on deeper community life.

Finally, participant heterogeneity is unknown. A delegation of a thousand includes many internal differences. Some delegates may return and speak with deep humility and compassion for all suffering; others may return with high certainty and an aggressive posture. Public analysis tends to overrepresent the loudest voices and therefore risks conflating the visible subset with the whole.

These uncertainties do not invalidate the analysis. They simply define its boundary: this paper describes the public-facing system, not the full internal reality of the program.

9.3 How to study future delegations without turning analysis into advocacy

The most difficult task in studying a politically charged religious phenomenon is remaining descriptively honest without becoming a participant in the conflict. Future research can avoid turning analysis into advocacy by adopting methodological disciplines that keep claims proportionate and motives unassumed.

First, separate layers: experience, framing, and mobilization. Report what was experienced (as described), identify how it was framed (rhetorically), and describe what actions were urged (mobilization). Do not collapse these layers into a single moral verdict. Compassionate witness and political mobilization can coexist, but they should not be treated as identical.

Second, maintain a "known / inferred / unknown" discipline. When the evidence is direct, say so. When it is inferred, say so. When it is unknown, say so. This simple discipline is the strongest protection against polemics.

Third, sample across the ecosystem rather than only at the top. Do not only analyze headline names and major outlets. Include mid-size churches, lesser-known pastors, and local testimonies. This reduces the risk of treating elite voices as representative of the whole.

Fourth, analyze symmetrical mechanisms. Apply the same analytic lens to counter-messaging and to the ambassador messaging. If one side's narratives are examined as frames, the other side's narratives should be examined the same way. This does not imply moral equivalence. It implies methodological fairness.

Fifth, keep a pastoral-ethics lens distinct from a geopolitical lens. A paper can evaluate whether a communication practice is spiritually and ethically responsible without claiming to settle international policy. This prevents the research from becoming a surrogate battleground for the conflict itself.

Finally, treat the church not as a demographic bloc but as a moral community with internal diversity. A good analysis will show how narratives land differently across generations, political identities, and personal histories. That internal diversity is not noise; it is the reality that pastors must shepherd.

If these disciplines are maintained, the study of future delegations can remain what it should be: a careful account of how moral narratives travel through institutions of trust, and how modern diplomacy increasingly relies on those institutions—not because they are easily manipulated, but because they remain among the few places where people still gather weekly to ask what is true and what is right.

10. References

10.1 Reporting on the delegation model, participant framing, and organizer claims

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- Barkley, Scott. “Supporting Israel at heart of more than 1,000 pastors’ visit.” Baptist Press, December 9, 2025.
- “Friends of Zion Summit Opens With Appeals for Unity, Moral Clarity, and Global Advocacy.” The Media Line, December 3, 2025.
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- “Friends of Zion Ambassadors Summit | December 3–7, 2025 | Israel | Unite. Stand. Act.” Friends of Zion Ambassadors Summit (official site; organizer framing and event description).

10.2 Coverage emphasizing commissioning language and pastoral vocation framing

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- “ ‘The pulpit has become quiet’: Jerusalem hosts 1,000 pastors to support Jewish state, combat antisemitism.” CBN News, December 2025.
- Barkley, Scott. “Supporting Israel at heart of more than 1,000 pastors’ visit.” Baptist Press, December 9, 2025. (Commissioning ceremony details and trip purpose claims, including statements attributed to Mike Evans and Benjamin Netanyahu.)
- Botbol, Amelie. “Christian pastors, influencers join 1,000-strong Israel mission…” Fox News, December 7, 2025. (Vetting/pledge and “unofficial ambassador” framing.)

10.3 On-site participant quotations and experiential testimony framing

- Gradstein, Linda. “Evangelical pastors honor freed hostages at Nova site.” JNS, December 6, 2025. (On-site ceremony narrative; organizer quotations; experiential framing.)

- Kamman, Samantha. “Over 1,000 American pastors vow to stand with Israel…” The Christian Post, December 12, 2025. (Participant reflections and quotations from Ronny Raines; itinerary references.)
- Barkley, Scott. “Supporting Israel at heart of more than 1,000 pastors’ visit.” Baptist Press, December 9, 2025. (Participant quotations; first-person testimony framing.)

10.4 Additional reporting on the event’s broader context and stated goals

- “Evangelicals’ support for Israel is dropping. 1,000 pastors want to reverse that.” The Washington Post, January 3, 2026. (Generational divergence context; stated purpose of the trip; media ecosystem dynamics.)
- “Israeli Government Is Spending Millions to Court American Evangelicals Amid Plummeting Public Support.” The Washington Spectator, January 8, 2026. (Budget/advocacy framing; delegation mechanics; foreign influence compliance discussion.)
- Pew Research Center. “Views of the Israel-Hamas war.” March 21, 2024. (Baseline public-opinion measures referenced in later reporting.)
- Pew Research Center. “How Americans view the Israel-Hamas conflict 2 years into the war.” October 3, 2025. (Longitudinal context for shifts discussed in 2025–2026 coverage.)
- “US-backed Gaza aid group names evangelical as chairman.” Reuters, June 3, 2025. (Background on Johnnie Moore’s public-facing roles in the wider Israel/Gaza information environment.)

The author has published ~ 5,000 AI-assisted papers at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Douglas-Youvan/research . Google Scholar has indexed these preprints, and if you want a particular reference, the AI mode of a Google search (Gemini) has efficiently catalogued these preprints.